

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Geraldine F. Powers
Current home town: Beachwood, Ohio
Age: 90

By Defining the Past, We Help Understand the Present

In 1943, I took my newly married 20 year old self to Camp Lee, Virginia where I hoped to be in close proximity to the love of my life, Pvt. Louis L. Powers, where he was enduring basic training. Left behind was my government job, a supportive family and a life I would no longer know. I had never lived away from home, even for a summer camp experience. It was a shocking upheaval, but a journey I never regretted.

Since Lou was not shipped out after Basic Training, I was able to transfer my government job to the Ordnance Office right on base where my husband was in training. In fact, I bumped into his squadron one day on a march and the Sgt. yelled “eyes right!” I blushed deeply as all eyes bore a hole into me.

Housing was tight in the tiny town of Petersburg, Virginia adjacent to Richmond. But, I managed to rent a room in town with a Mrs. Bailey for \$7.00 a week, including breakfast. I could elect to have dinner for 60 cents. Lou would join me whenever he possibly could, but had to disappoint me many a night when he suddenly pulled guard duty or some other hapless assignment. Without cell phones or iPods etc., I would be left waiting in anguish.

My very first week at Mrs. Bailey’s, I stayed home from work one day to observe the Jewish Holiday of Rosh Hashana. When Mrs. Bailey spotted me, she screwed up her face and mentioned “some strange Jew Holiday.” I froze! Nevertheless, I lived with her for almost three years, and she learned to respect me and understand what being Jewish meant. We became very good friends.

My job in the Ordnance Department and waiting for Lou became my whole life. I worked with a contingent of WACS, enlisted men and officers and rose from bookkeeper to secretary to the Colonel in charge. The time came when Lou was alerted to be shipped overseas right before D-Day. I was devastated. The Colonel took note of my grief and questioned me about Lou’s credentials. Lou had been in the last quarter of his senior year at The Ohio State University in Dairy Technology/Food Chemistry when he was called up. Lo and behold, the Colonel had Lou transferred to the Veterinary Corps on base, giving us a precious chance to remain together a while longer.

Finally, Lou was accepted to Officers Training School, and after a grueling eight week training experience, he graduated as a 2nd. Lt. at Camp Lee, Virginia. Graduation day was accomplished with much pomp and circumstance. There was a formal dinner dance that evening, but we were shocked and deeply disturbed upon learning that Lou’s OCS buddy and partner, Hobbs, and his wife could not attend the festivities because the hotel would not accommodate black people.

After graduation, Lou was assigned to Fort Warren in Cheyenne, Wyoming where he would embark on Arctic training. I had no trouble transferring my government position to Fort Warren where I worked happily in the Legal Assistance Office. Housing was even more limited, but we managed to rent a basement room close to the base. The Officers Dining Room was staffed by many German prisoners of war. That was unsettling. I used to wonder if they might want to poison us.

After a few months Lou was slated for overseas duty. I had grown accustomed to the idea and I followed him to his point of embarkation outside of San Francisco. I was not supposed to be privy to any information concerning his departure. But, we managed to slink around in the shadows to capture a few last moments together. After he boarded the ship, I went into mourning because I had the awful fear that he would never return. I was more afraid of the Japanese than the Germans at that time. Little did we know that this was going to be the year of the ATOM BOMB!

Now, I had to attend to the business of returning home to Cleveland, Ohio. San Francisco was a frenzy of thousands of servicemen awaiting railroad transportation back East. I managed to land a reservation, but would have to wait seven days to board. When I finally reached my turn, I was on a train filled with servicemen including a group just released from the notorious Japanese Bilibad prison. One of them, with a wooden peg leg, befriended me and made me realize how lucky Lou and I had been up to that moment.

After I returned, the days centered around letters. Lou was stationed in bombed-out Manila in the Philippines as Food Service Director (he had trained for Arctic conditions). We wrote every day, but the mail was sporadic. After certain periods with no mail, three or four letters would arrive together. My mother would get on a street car for half an hour and deliver the letters to me at my work in the Ordnance Dept. at the Terminal Tower. She saved me from waiting all day to receive these precious letters which were my life line.

At one point, I wrote to General Eisenhower requesting permission to join my husband in Manila. I saved his personal reply dated 1 February 1946. A copy of the letter is herewith enclosed.

Shortly after this came the advent of the Atomic Bomb. Lou came down with a bad case of pneumonia and he was sent back to the States on the Hospital Ship, *The Milne*, and we were finally reunited.

Lt. Louis L. Powers died on August 25, 1985 of Non Hodgkins Lymphoma.

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE CHIEF OF STAFF
WASHINGTON

1 February 1946

Dear Mrs. Powers:

I know how much it would mean to have your husband with you once more, for having been away from my family for a long period of time, I can appreciate the loneliness and heartaches which are felt when we are separated from our loved ones.

While the difference between the requirements for discharge of officers and discharge of enlisted men may seem unfair to you, I hope you may understand that the number of officers being discharged is in proportion to that of enlisted men. When you remember the far greater number of enlisted men in the Army and the fact that most officers have had longer periods of service, you will appreciate the necessity for the higher requirements for release of officers. If we discharged officers who have 45 points as of 2 September 1945, or three years service, there would not be enough left in the Army to conduct the vitally required operations.

While there is nothing that I can do to bring your husband home to you now, I have referred your letter to a member of my staff who will advise you of the possibility of your receiving transportation to Manila. This officer will write to you at an early date.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Geraldine F. Powers
1044 Linn Drive
Cleveland 8, Ohio